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Articles in Today's Clips Monday, May 14, 2007

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Trial continues for Canton day care director

May 11, 2007

By CECIL ANGEL

FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

A Plymouth district judge said today there could be a plea agreement in the case of a day care center director charged with failing to report suspected child abuse.

35th District Judge Ronald Lowe said the Wayne County Prosecutor's Office and attorneys for Jacqueline Hadwin have been in talks about a plea. Lowe adjourned today's pretrial hearing until 9 a.m. Wednesday.

The parties were in court today to discuss various pretrial motions, including witness lists, jury instructions and a motion to dismiss the case.

Hadwin, 36, of Westland was charged after 2-year-old Allison Newman died Sept. 22 in her Canton Township foster home. Her foster mother, Carol Poole, 40, has been charged with first-degree murder and child abuse in the case.

Prosecutors say Hadwin saw bruises and scratches on Allison at least once, but did not call Child Protective Services. If convicted of the misdemeanor charge, she faces up to 93 days in jail or a \$500 fine or both. Hadwin has denied wrongdoing.

Allison attended the Childtime Learning Center in Plymouth five days a week. The state closed the center in October.

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Detroit Free Press

Wayne County news briefs

May 13, 2007

PLYMOUTH: Plea agreement possible for child care worker

A Plymouth district judge said there could be a plea agreement in the case of a day care center director charged with failing to report suspected child abuse.

On Friday, 35th District Judge Ronald Lowe said that the Wayne County Prosecutor's Office and attorneys for Jacqueline Hadwin have been discussing an agreement. Lowe adjourned Friday's pretrial hearing until 9 a.m. Wednesday.

Hadwin, 36, of Westland was charged after 2-year-old Allison Newman died Sept. 22 in her Canton foster home. Prosecutors say Hadwin saw bruises and scratches on Allison at least once, but did not call Child Protective Services. If convicted, she could face up to 93 days in jail or a \$500 fine, or both. Hadwin has denied wrongdoing.

Compiled by Zachary Gorchow and Cecil Angel.



THE ANN ARBOR NEWS

Child killer gets life in prison

Judge calls mother who beat daughter a repeat abuser

Friday, May 11, 2007

BY ART AISNER

News Staff Reporter

Washtenaw Circuit Judge David Swartz said he didn't believe LaToya Joplin intended to kill her 3-year-old child during a severe beating at her Ypsilanti Township home last July.

However, Swartz said Thursday, he had no doubt Joplin was a repeat child abuser who inexcusably used force to alter the child's behavior.

He sentenced Joplin to prison for life.

In handing down the sentence, Swartz noted that Joplin had told police she had beat her daughter so hard the day the child died that her hands hurt, making her a victim more than a criminal.

"I think you'd have to go far and wide to find more than a few people who would agree to beating a child to the point of hurting your hand because she was not responding how you wanted her to," Swartz said.

Joplin, 30, was convicted of felony murder and first-degree child abuse after a week-long trial last month. Trial testimony showed she beat Kayla severely enough to cause numerous internal injuries, including a torn heart, which killed her. Witnesses also testified to a series of injuries the toddler suffered at the hands of her mother, including deep bruises, loose teeth, broken bones and lacerations.

Joplin's assertions that the beatings were a form of discipline to stop Kayla from acting up proved the defendant had no regard for the child's welfare, Swartz said.

Joplin showed no emotion during Thursday's hearing and declined an opportunity to address Swartz prior to sentencing.

Her attorney, Peter Ellenson, described the situation as "a tragedy she'll have to live with for the rest of her life."

Swartz sentenced Joplin for the murder, which occurred during the commission of a felony, in this case child abuse. He vacated the conviction on the child abuse charge because Michigan law dictates the underlying felony charge in a felony-murder conviction must be dismissed. The law is currently being challenged at the state supreme court level, attorneys said.

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Toddler drowns in tub; parents' rights challenged

Petition filed to take custody of twin sister

May 13, 2007

BY JACK KRESNAK

FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

A 22-month-old baby girl drowned -- but her twin sister survived -- after they were left alone last week in the bathtub of a Redford Township home, authorities said Saturday.

The apparent negligence that caused the death of Caylin McCreary prompted the state's child welfare agency to file a petition in Wayne County Family Court to terminate the parental rights of the mother, Cierra McCreary, to Caylin's twin.

McCreary, 20, of Redford Township and the baby's putative father, D'Andre Mays, 23, of Detroit appeared in the juvenile division of Family Court Saturday for a preliminary hearing and received a copy of the petition filed by the Child Protective Services unit of the Wayne County Department of Human Services.

The DHS placed Caylin's twin with the maternal grandmother, who brought the baby with her to the hearing Saturday in a courtroom at the Wayne County Juvenile Detention Facility.

The hearing will be continued on May 18.

The parents declined to comment Saturday, but the mother's court-assigned attorney Deborah Trent said, "This was a tragic accident and it can only be compounded by the petition for permanent custody."

According to the petition, Redford Township police were called to McCreary's home on Pembroke at about 10 p.m. Wednesday. Police and paramedics found the mother trying to resuscitate Caylin.

The baby was rushed to Botsford Hospital in Farmington Hills, where she was pronounced dead at 10:30 p.m.

An autopsy listed the cause of death as accidental drowning.

McCreary told police that one twin was in the bathtub full of water by herself and that Caylin was secured into a baby seat that was attached to the edge of the tub. She said she left the bathroom and went down the hall to her bedroom for a few minutes, then went back to check on the children again.

They were fine, McCreary said. But then she left to get a towel and was gone about "a minute." When she returned, Caylin was floating facedown in the water and her sister had climbed out of the tub, the mother told police.

Parents should never leave small children alone in the bathtub, said Dr. Marcus DeGraw, director of the child protection team at Detroit's St. John Hospital. "Even a couple of inches can be deadly," DeGraw said. "It doesn't have to be a full tub of water."

Police detectives involved could not be reached Saturday, but no criminal charges have been filed.

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05/13/2007

Traverse City Record Eagle Week in Review

OTSEGO

Accused biter runs a day care

GAYLORD — A Gaylord school bus driver accused of biting two middle school girls in separate instances also runs a home-based day care now under investigation by state officials.

Patricia Lynn Lawes, 44, was put on administrative leave last week pending an internal investigation by officials at Gaylord Community Schools. Digital video footage from the bus is being reviewed and the driver could be fired by school trustees, something they could consider at a meeting next week.

Police were notified of the alleged assaults.

Lawes recently was transferred to drive another bus route after being reprimanded for speaking inappropriately to students, said school Superintendent Cheryl Wojtas.

Lawes has a clean driving record and has been licensed to operate a school bus since September 1998, said Fred Woodhams of the Michigan Secretary of State's Office.

The alleged biting incidents may have prompted state officials to launch an investigation into Lawes' day care center on Fisher Road, said Maureen Sorbert, spokeswoman for the state Department of Human Services. She declined to release details of the current probe.

Lawes can still baby-sit up to six children at her home business seven days a week, but the investigation could change that, Sorbert said.

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Article published May 11, 2007

STATE: Man accused of sex abuse may lose parental rights

Proceedings have begun to terminate the parental rights of a 48-year-old Commerce Township man accused of sexually abusing his 14-year-old daughter.

The man was charged in 52-1 District Court in Novi on Tuesday with four counts of second-degree criminal sexual conduct.

His attorney in the parental-rights case, Daniel Bagdade, said a hearing was held in juvenile court Monday to end the man's rights to the teen and her 17-year-old sister.

Bagdade said he wants to hold off on a juvenile court hearing until the criminal case has been tried. He said his client, who still is in the Oakland County Jail on a \$4-million bond, is distraught.

"He's worried about his daughter and how she's doing and her emotional state," Bagdade said. "It's just very hard for him."

The man is a teacher at Oxford Middle and High schools. School officials indicated he will be fired when they get official notice from the court about the charges.

—Gannett News Service



05/11/2007

Circuit Court News

The Huron Daily Tribune

The following appeared recently before Judge M. Richard Knoblock.

A 19-year-old Pigeon man was arraigned in Huron County Circuit Court on April 26 on charges.

In a plea agreement with the Huron County Prosecutor's Office, Travis Randall Luther pled guilty to first-degree child abuse. In return for his guilty plea, two other charges of criminal sexual conduct, third-degree, are to be dismissed at the time of sentencing June 18.

Bond for Luther was continued.

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Benefits for Grant kids continue to raise funds

Evening of entertainment, golf outing planned.

By Mitch Hotts

Macomb Daily Staff Writer

Organizers of fund-raisers for the children of slain businesswoman Tara Grant say there appears to be no loss of interest in their charitable efforts.

Tickets for a June 10 fund-raiser in Shelby Township, priced at \$40 each, are selling almost as fast as they are printed.

"I went out today with packs of 25 tickets and sold five packs," said Vince Viviano of the Warren Bank, which is overseeing a fund for the children.

Viviano said many people want to buy the tickets to help the family.

"People are aware of what happened and they know we're trying to help the children. They know there's no funny business, they feel comfortable in doing the right thing for these kids," he said.

Tara Grant, 34, of Washington Township, was reported missing Feb. 9 after returning home from a business trip to her employer's field office in San Juan, Puerto Rico. Police later discovered her dismembered remains in her family's home and other body parts scattered in Stony Creek Metropark.

Her husband, Steven Grant, is being held in Macomb County Jail without bond after he was charged with first-degree murder in connection with her death.

Almost immediately, local business leaders set up a fund at Warren Bank and initiated a series of fund-raisers for the Grant children, Lindsay, 6, and Ian, 4.

The children are currently staying with the family of Tara's sister, Alicia Standerfer in Chillicothe, Ohio.

Both Standerfer and Steven Grant's sister, Kelly Utykanski of Sterling Heights, have filed for adoption of the children.

The latest fund-raisers to be announced include a May 21 golf outing at Gowanie Golf Club in Harrison Township sponsored by Prime Time Laboratories. Admission is \$150 for a round of golf and a meal, or \$75 just for the meal.

The other fund-raiser is the Tara's Children Fund committee holding an event at Teddy's Times Square in Shelby Township from 3 to 8 p.m. on June 10. The event includes a barbecue, live entertainment, and a silent auction.

Tickets are \$40 for the event, which is for adults 21 and over.

Previous fund-raisers have taken in tens of thousands of dollars so far that will be used for the children's expenses and education costs, according to organizers.

For more information on either event, call Vince Viviano at Warren Bank at (586) 416-1650.

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Article published May 13, 2007

Safe at home — Girl survives abuse ordeal, finds new life with adoptive family

By Lisa Roose-Church
DAILY PRESS & ARGUS

Editor's note: This is the first of a series featuring Livingston County's "Extraordinary Women."

Tiffany Sharlee Kline, 15, says her early childhood memories include being held at gunpoint by her biological parents, who she says sexually abused her, threatened to kill her and often laced her baby formula, milk and juice with illegal narcotics.

Tiffany was moved from foster home to foster home until her biological mother reappeared to claim her and begin the cycle of abuse all over again. Then, Tiffany would find herself abandoned once again and in foster care.

At age 6, the rail-thin girl finally found her place — at the home of her adoptive parents, Charle and Keith Kline of Deerfield Township.

"I live with one extraordinary young woman," Charle Kline said of Tiffany. "She is a survivor of child abuse — physical, mental, and sexual. ... Tiffany is an amazing young lady with a loving heart. Her life will only continue to touch other lives for the better. She is strong, intelligent, caring and a survivor."

At 15, Tiffany is one of Livingston County's extraordinary women.

When asked if she feels extraordinary, Tiffany shrugged shyly, and let her eyes roam around her "one-room house" — an outbuilding on her parent's property that functions as her own personal sanctuary — before petting her dog, lying near her feet.

"I think she's really the extraordinary one," she said, pointing toward her mother.

Painful beginnings

The abuse began even before Tiffany was born.

Her birth mother used alcohol, cocaine, heroin and pills during pregnancy, Charle Kline said, which set the stage for a lifetime of learning disabilities for Tiffany.

"She was left in her crib, hungry and wet, and with no interaction," Charle Kline said. "The physical abuse took on the forms of severe beatings, starvation."

She also was mentally abused. Her birth parents repeatedly told her she was worthless and deserved to be hurt. She was scared and confused, eventually entering the state's foster system.

"Much to her dismay, she was returned to her abuser again and again," Charle Kline said. "Each time, the abuse became more intense. Her life was now bouncing back and forth, in and out of foster care. Early on, Tiffany wanted to be adopted and felt let down by those who should have cared."

Family waits

Fate turned in Tiffany's favor.

In the summer of 1998, Charle and Keith Kline became licensed foster-care providers; in July of that year, they met Tiffany.

Then 6, Tiffany was thin and sickly looking the day she ran across the Klines' front yard.

She also was eager to please the Klines, performing "like a monkey" in the hopes her new foster parents would like her, Charle Kline said.

"When our eyes met we both knew this would be the last stop," she said. "I looked into those blue eyes and saw a spirit that had given way to despair."

Tiffany's scars ran deep. She refused to look the Klines in the face, preferring instead to stare at her feet. She was malnourished and had no self-esteem.

Tiffany shared her life story with Charle Kline, and blamed herself for her plight.

Smitten, the Klines immediately began adoption proceedings, but her birth father, who was in prison for shooting and killing Tiffany's aunt — an act Tiffany witnessed — fought the adoption.

At age 7, Tiffany expressed her thoughts in a short essay saying, "All I want is to be adopted right now. No more caseworkers. ... I love my family and I want my name to change. No one wants to listen to me. No one has listened. No one cares how I feel. I am angry. I want to get on with my life."

Her birth mother was making that wish seem impossible. She still had visitation rights, and she took every opportunity to belittle the little girl and threatened her if she was to be adopted.

"She said, 'I will hunt you down and kill you,' " Charle Kline recalled.

Her birth mother also refused to let her cut her long hair. Defiantly, Tiffany chopped her hair to the scalp. Charle Kline discovered the haircut when when she woke Tiffany for what was to be the final visit with her birth mother.

Charle Kline had enough.

"I became her voice and began to advocate for her rights," Charle said. "I wrote letters, made telephone calls, and put pressure on agencies. On Aug. 25, 1999, this beautiful survivor became my daughter."

Tiffany was adopted by the Klines and she ripped up every picture and threw away every memento she had of her previous life.

"I wanted to keep nothing," Tiffany said. "I didn't care. I didn't like them. I basically hated them for what they did."

New life, new name

She changed her name. She wanted to call herself Charle, after the woman who nurtured and loved her, but Charle encouraged her to find her own identity.

In the end, she decided on Tiffany as her first name and Sharlee, a play on her new mother's name, as her middle name.

Since then, Tiffany has struggled with learning disabilities, depression and post-traumatic stress disorder.

She has also succeeded where others told her she could not. Told she may never learn to read, Tiffany now reads and comprehends at the college level.

She consistently lands on the honor roll. Her dream is to be a horse veterinarian. She is active in Girl Scouts, earning her Bronze Award and Silver Award, and she's starting on the Gold Award.

Tiffany is active in church and volunteers in the community.

She's forgiven her birth mother, who froze to death on the street in Detroit; and made peace with her past.

Charle Kline recently presented Tiffany with a baby photo of herself. In that photo, the teenage Tiffany can see the innocence of her infancy, and that where she came from was a necessity to where she is now and where she is going in the future.

"I cannot imagine life without this little survivor," Charle Kline said. "For the last nine years I have been a strong advocate for children's mental health issues and outspoken on the devastation of child abuse. These are two hats that I would not be wearing if it were not for my daughter."

"I am a very active volunteer in my community, and Tiffany and I often pair up together. We have an inseparable bond and a strong inner strength to face all issues that still will arise," she added.

Tiffany agrees.

"I am really, really close to my mom," she said. "I can trust her way better than I can trust anyone."

She even plans on building a home on 6 acres her parents own, so she can remain close to her parents.

To other mothers, Tiffany offers this advice:

"Never do drugs. It just adds to the child's disabilities. You should never beat them or abuse them. You should never abandon them like I was."

Contact Daily Press & Argus reporter Lisa Roose-Church at (517) 552-2846 or at lrchurch@gannett.com.



Muskegon Chronicle

Mother Sharri: Adoptive parent can't imagine life before

Sunday, May 13, 2007

By Susan Harrison Wolffis

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By now, Sharri Lane can't imagine life without kids.

The pile of tennis shoes at the back door. The constant questions about everything from what's for dinner to why clouds sometimes have color. The doctors' appointments.

The goodnight kisses.

Even the "timeouts" for bad behavior.

"There are times I ask myself: What have I gotten myself into?" she says, but in a tone that lets people know she's just about the luckiest person in the world.

"To be able to influence someone's life, a child's life, that's just about the best thing there is for a mother," she says.

But not so very long ago, she and her husband, Joe Lane, were childless. Their home wasn't empty; they had each other. Nor were their lives ever completely without children. She teaches social science classes in street law and history at Muskegon High School. He's assistant principal at Reeths-Puffer

Middle School. And then there are the kids to nurture at New Life Christian Center in Muskegon where Joe Lane is pastor.

But in 2004, after six years of marriage, there were still no children to call their own.

"I was an only child," Sharri Lane says. "I was lonely a lot. I really wanted a boy and a girl."

She got two boys.

Three years ago, Sharri Lane and her husband became the foster parents of two young half-brothers -- Trent, now 8, and Paris, who is 4. They adopted Paris that same year. In 2005, Trent's adoption was finalized.

The boys, who were victims of neglect and abuse, had been in foster care since they were infants. They were in the same foster home when a Catholic Social Services worker asked the Lanes if they'd like to meet them because they needed to find them a new place to live.

They met in a McDonald's play area for their first contact.

Joe Lane, 35, a man who works with middle school-age kids every day of his life, was shocked at what he saw.

"They were the wildest kids I've ever seen," he says. "Wow."

Sharri Lane, 34, who took a leave of absence from her teaching job to be with the boys, started with the basics: discipline, manners, responsibilities.

"I feel like I saved their lives," she says quietly.

"I don't take any credit," her husband adds. "It's all her doing ... they know they have a family now, a family they can count on."

Still, it's been a roller-coaster of emotions and challenges the past three years with the boys who had been in the foster care system from the time they were infants.

"I catch it because (their biological mother) left them," Sharri Lane says.

Even when the times are difficult, she thinks back to the days when there were no tennis shoes cluttering up the back steps; no need for rules or a mother's expectations.

"I do it because I know this is what God wants me to do," she says. "All I want is for them to be successful, responsible adults that God will be proud of."

In 2006, she and her husband added to the family -- a baby girl who still is in foster care and cannot be identified because she is a ward of the state. Once again, Sharri Lane took a leave of absence to be with the baby.

Her husband calls it a "sacrifice."

But others see it otherwise.

"She couldn't be more committed to this family they're creating," said Maureen Fitzgerald Penn, marketing and development director of Catholic Social Services in Muskegon. "She's really quite remarkable."

"She's my third mom," Trent announces, naming his two former foster mothers in the list. "She's the best."

"I love her!" shouts Paris.

"Me, too," Trent answers.

How much does he love her? Three days before Mother's Day, Trent counts the ways.

"What do I love the most?" he asks. "Well, when she makes me dinner and washes my clothes."

"And what's for dinner?" Mom asks Trent.

"Chicken toes!" Paris butts in.

"What's that mean?" Dad asks.

"Wait and see what's for supper," Trent asks.

Of the two boys, Trent suffers more obvious signs of neglect. He often went without food; hence, the comment about mom making dinner. But this is Mother's Day, and Dad tries to get a more emotional proclamation of love from the boy.

"What's the most fun things she does?" he asks Trent.

"When she makes dinner and washes my clothes," Trent repeats.

Why?

"It makes me feel safe," the 8-year-old says. "Totally. "

A year after she and Joe were married, Sharri Lane suffered a tubal pregnancy and was rushed into emergency surgery when one of her fallopian tubes burst.

Over the next few years, she miscarried twice. Finally, the Lanes turned to a fertility specialist who recommended more surgery to remove fibroids from her uterus. During the operation, he cut her small

intestine.

"I was so sick," she says.

When Sharri Lane finally healed, she and her husband tried "in vitro fertilization" twice, but were unsuccessful. Discouraged, the couple decided to let nature -- and prayer -- take its course. They stopped all medical treatment to get pregnant.

"I'd had seven surgeries in seven years. Enough was enough," Sharri Lane said.

Early in their relationship, the couple talked hypothetically about adoption -- but it was a subject neither broached after so much heartache.

Until their wedding anniversary in 2003.

As a gift, Joe Lane went to several adoption agencies and got as much literature on the subject as he could. Then he put the material in a wooden box, wrapped it and gave it to his wife at dinner.

"I cried and cried and cried," Sharri Lane says.

As Sharri Lane speaks, Paris' ears perk up.

"When I was a baby, was I in your tummy?" Paris asks out of the clear blue.

He's sitting at the kitchen table, the place the family congregates after school to do homework before the boys can head outside to play.

At 4, Paris is all dimples and smiles. He leans toward his Mom who's across from him.

"You were here," she tells him, pointing at her heart. "You were here in my heart."

He raises a hand, gives her a high five and everyone -- even the baby -- breaks out laughing.

The Lanes chose domestic adoption "because there are thousands of kids right here who need a home," Sharri Lane says. "We (Americans) need to do that more."

The boys were considered "special needs" children because they were not infants when adopted, says Penn. Their age was never a factor, their mom says, but their desperate situation was.

"I would just encourage people to not just think of themselves," Sharri Lane says, "but to open up their homes and hearts to children."

A woman blessed with a big laugh and wide smile, she and her husband repeat the words, then share a high five.

"I like it," he says.

At this point in the conversation, they are alone with the baby who is playing with the pots and pans in the cupboard, singing to herself as the Lanes talk. The boys are both outside riding their bikes; no homework got in the way of afternoon play. Both got their chores done for the day. Trent swept the floor; Paris emptied waste baskets.

It was a good day.

There are challenges ahead. Trent has just been diagnosed with Attention Deficit and Hyperactivity Disorder, and both boys still suffer the aftermath from the neglect and abuse in their birth home.

But there are moments when their mother sees them, and they are almost carefree -- and she knows she's just received her Mother's Day gift, no matter what the date is on the calendar.

She can't imagine life without them.

"When I see them with chocolate all over their mouths, or they've just eaten ice cream, I know I'm watching

them enjoy life," she says, "and that's enough for me."

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THE ANN ARBOR NEWS

Adoption caseworker can relate to families Personal experiences help her on the job

Sunday, May 13, 2007

BY AMY WHITESALL

News Staff Reporter

Monica Ireland-Hicks has been processing adoptions in the Washtenaw County courts for eight years. Finalization hearings still choke her up. In the day-to-day world of disrupted lives that pass through the courts, a finalized adoption represents just the opposite.

"Adoptions put people together," Ireland-Hicks said. "People are happy when they leave here."

That feels good, but Ireland-Hicks, the county's adoption and guardianship caseworker, also understands adoption at a much more personal level.

In 1992 Monica Ireland was a 21-year-old single mom with a toddler son, waiting tables and taking classes at Washtenaw Community College. She was trying to build a better life, but just barely getting by. And then she learned she was pregnant again.

She knew she couldn't support another baby. She also knew she didn't want an abortion. With the help of Catholic Social Services, she arranged an open adoption and her daughter, who's now 14, became part of a family in Canton. Ireland-Hicks and her daughter stay in touch through letters and photos, send gifts in the mail and see each other from time to time, a bit like a distant aunt and niece. Their respective lives have filled in independent of each other, and Ireland-Hicks is fine with that.

"People expect me to be morbidly upset about it all the time, and I'm not," she said. "My daughter's doing fine; her parents love her to death. I was able to go on and get a college degree; I've got a good job now. I can see both sides. ... It was a positive choice, not something I really spent a lot of time being upset about."

Ireland-Hicks spent 10 years earning a criminal justice degree, intent on working in the juvenile probation department. She was still in school when she took a job with the county.

"When they hired me in, I just wanted to do anything at juvenile court; I didn't care what," she said. "They said, 'How about adoption clerk?'"

She couldn't have found a better fit. Ireland-Hicks was promoted to caseworker a year ago, and her colleagues in the probate court nominated her for Employee of the Year this spring.

"For all sorts of reasons, Monica can relate to the people that she's helping," said Ireland-Hicks' supervisor, probate register/referee Jennifer Niemer. "She knows it from every aspect. She can totally understand all the situations these families are going through, and I think that puts people at ease."

She married in 2000 and her husband, Tyrone, adopted her son. They now have a 3-year-old daughter. Just before she was born they assumed guardianship of a boy from West Africa, a friend of her son's whose mother had to return to her native country.

Though she says people were generally compassionate when her older daughter was born, she lost some friends over her adoption decision. Just as she stands by her own choices, she's careful not to judge the people she helps for theirs. She accepts people as they are, Niemer said, and treats each family, however it might be configured, as if it were her own.

Ireland-Hicks summarizes each case for Niemer at the finalization hearings and makes a recommendation

on the adoption. And then she shares in the hugs and tears. People tell her God put her in this position, and though she's not particularly religious, she doesn't argue.

"I honestly feel rewarded (in) every case," she said. "Every case is different; every family is unique; every child is special ... I enjoy my job. I think I'm here for a reason."

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the Compassionate mother

BURTON

THE FLINT JOURNAL FIRST EDITION

Sunday, May 13, 2007

By Beata Mostafavi

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BURTON - Under a sunny sky, Melody Moore watched 6-year-old adopted son Tyler scurry between a sandbox and dandelion-strewn yard.

The first thing Melody learned years ago - when Tyler came to her home as a premature foster baby - was that being his mom meant getting trained to use the tracheotomy in his neck.

It meant nights sleeping on a couch near his crib, waking to an alarm every few hours to feed him through the tube in his tummy.

It meant days in a hospital, waiting nervously through surgeries. And after all that, she listened to a doctor say this boy would never walk, maybe not live.

Still, she wanted to be his mother.

Mother's Day is about honoring moms. But Melody, 49, said for her, it's just a reminder of how lucky she is that so many children call her "mom."

"You put in so many hours, so much love and concern, you stay up so many nights with them. You just bond," said Melody, while cradling adopted daughter Lexi, 3 - who has a tracheotomy in her neck and was born with bronchial pulmonary dysplasia, a narrowing of the airways.

Children like Tyler and Lexi, who suffer severe medical problems and require intense care, often have a harder time getting placed in foster homes and being adopted, according to foster care agencies.

That's why when Melody and husband Steven, 44, decided to foster six years ago, Melody specifically signed up to take care of sick children who needed homes.

For her, being a mother - which she is to seven biological children, two adopted children and several foster children - means this:

- Taking care of babies who come straight from an intensive care unit. Spending nights and sometimes weeks in the hospital.
- Becoming an expert on feeding tubes, breathing machines and tracheotomies.
- Coping with watching sick children she loves die.

The kids whom Melody fosters - often with the intent to adopt - suffer everything from severe breathing problems to sclerosis and physical handicaps.

"We kind of call her an angel around here," said Amy Anderson, licensing supervisor at Alternatives for Children and Families in Flint.

"(Melody) will give her heart and soul to any child. She goes over and beyond what would ever be asked of anybody and never complains. She goes through more with these kids on a daily basis than any of us could ever imagine.

"We need more moms like her. She's remarkable."

Melody, whose own parents were foster parents, persuaded Steven they should be a foster family.

Not that he didn't see it coming.

How many children do you want? they once asked each other. Two, he said. Twelve, she said.

"She is the most compassionate person I've ever met," said Steven, who currently has a tutor job while taking classes at Baker College.

He has always worked while Melody stayed at home.

Melody said when people asked her what she wanted to be when she grew up, "I always said I wanted to be a mom."

"The Lord gave me seven beautiful, healthy biological children, but there are so many children out there that are sick and need special care," she said. "For some people, it really is too much work to handle."

But she found it hard to let go, which is why the couple began adopting the children they could.

"It is really hard to let loose of medical kids because of all the care you give them," she said. "I just can't imagine them being raised without a family, without a home."

Born premature, Tyler came to the couple with a tracheotomy, a feeding tube and issues ranging from serious breathing problems to life-threatening acid reflux.

Flipping through a thick album, Melody points to a 13-month-old Tyler, whose small, reddish body is barely visible through a web of colorful wires and a ventilator in a hospital bed.

That was when it was touch-and-go after one of his surgeries, and Melody stayed at the hospital 31 of the 32 days he was there.

"They told me they weren't sure if he'd pull through or not," Melody said quietly, adding with a soft smile, "but he did."

More pictures show Tyler - who a neurologist said probably would never walk - learning to crawl with a long tracheotomy hose trailing behind him.

"He's our little miracle," said Melody, wrapping her arms around him and playfully rubbing his blondish head.

There is a photo of him taking his first steps. And just a week ago, he rode a bike sans training wheels.

"The doctors at the hospital attest that what really pulled this child so far is the amount of love this family has given him," said Alternatives' Anderson.

But not all children beat the odds.

The Moores still get teary-eyed when they talk about adopted son Ryan.

The little boy, believed to have been a child of incest, was born with various physical anomalies including crippled hands, severe club feet, sclerosis and a disproportionate head size.

He couldn't sit up, had great difficulties chewing, and at age 2, his lungs were the size of a 3-month-old's.

But he was also the child who put his arms up the instant someone walked by, meaning "pick me up." He loved macaroni and cheese, albeit ground up.

He clapped happily when he got to ride in the car with siblings.

"He brought us so much joy, so many memories," Melody said.

Then one dark morning Steven heard his wife's screams. She had found Ryan in his crib, and he wasn't breathing. He was just 2 years old.

Ryan's death came barely a month after the couple suffered heartbreak from the death of a 1-year-old foster daughter they also adored.

That was when the couple held a family meeting with their biological children, who now range in age from 11 to 22.

"I said, 'If you guys say stop doing this because you can't take it anymore, we'll stop,'" Steven remembered. "Every one of them said we have to go on."

Melody credits her children, six of whom still live at home, for their help and being OK with sharing their mom.

There have been times they were without her on a birthday or holiday because she had to take a sick child to the hospital.

And on days Melody drives the blue van bearing the words "mom's taxi" to Ann Arbor for doctor appointments and surgeries, they are the ones who help dad on the homefront.

"She'll do anything for

any of her kids. Her whole life revolves around them," said son Thomas, 21, who is studying at Baker to be a paramedic and lives at home. "It's what she loves. But

she always had time for all of us.

"If they would let her, she would just keep taking as many kids as she could," he added with a laugh.

Yvwanita Richardson, CEO of Alternatives for Children and Families, said Melody put in a lot of time to get her family trained for the around-the-clock care needed.

"These are extraordinarily sick children. Some have short life expectancies and require a lot of additional care and nurturing," Richardson said. "We have more than 100 families, but this mom sticks out because of what she's done."

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Teenage sisters take on burden of raising seven younger siblings



Luella (Stasewich) Rose, seated, is flanked by her two younger sisters, Sandy Verbrigghe, left, and Nancy Hendrickson. As the oldest of 10 children, Rose was left with the responsibility of caring for her younger siblings when both her parents died when she was 17 years old. She is now mother of six, grandmother of 13 and will soon be great-grandmother of two. (Dorothy McKnight | Daily Press)

By Dorothy McKnight — dmcknight@dailypress.net

ESCANABA — “Who’s going to ask me to the prom?” “When am I going to get a car of my own?” “What college should I apply for?”

As the majority of 17-year-old girls are completing their final year or two in high school, concerns such as these may be on the mind of many of them.

But Luella Stasewich of Escanaba didn’t have time to address such concerns when she was in school in the late 1940s. Her future — as least for the next few years — was already settled, and the prom and college were not even in the mix. Instead, she was concerned with how she and her younger sister, Nancy, were going to raise their seven younger siblings after the untimely death of their mother and father within five months of each other in 1948.

Although she is now confined to a wheelchair because of a broken hip and stroke that left her unable to speak, Lou wiped her eyes again and again as Nancy and their youngest sister, Sandy, recalled the difficult years when their family struggled to survive intact.

“Lou would have loved to have gone to college,” said Sandy. “She always dreamed of being a nurse. She graduated with honors and could easily have gone on to college but it just wasn’t possible.”

Born in 1931 in Escanaba, Lou was the oldest of the 10 surviving children in her family.

“Our mother would have had 18 kids but eight died,” Nancy explained.

Their father, a Russian immigrant, couldn’t speak a word of English upon his arrival in the United States. Drawn to the local area because of the lumber trade, he worked in lumber camps and for the I. Stephenson Company before opening up a small grocery store and later a boarding house in north Escanaba where the family made its home.

Nancy was 12 when her parents died; Sandy only 2. An infant brother who was born days before his mother's death, was raised by an aunt and uncle who later adopted him.

"Our brother Jim was only 13 and became the man of the house," said Sandy. "He went to work in the woods with our Uncle Ernie. When he got enough money saved up, he bought us our first refrigerator."

The lack of a refrigerator wasn't the family's only hardship.

"We had indoor plumbing but no hot water heater or furnace," Sandy recalled. "We just had a Jungers space heater and if you set a glass of water on the table by your bed at night in the winter, it always had ice in it in the morning. It was so cold."

Lou laughed when her sisters told of multiple children sleeping in the same bed at night in an effort to keep warm.

But despite their responsibilities at home, Lou and Nancy were not about to neglect their education.

Both women give credit to John Lemmer, former Escanaba High School principal, and Clarence Zerbel, principal of the junior high school, for helping them complete their schooling. Arrangements were made for Lou to attend school in the morning and Nancy in the afternoon. Even though they had reduced class time, both girls graduated with honors.

"When Lou graduated, Mr. Lemmer was so proud of her that he and his wife bought her a nice slip to wear under her dress at graduation," said Nancy.

The family also received help from other family members, friends and neighbors who provided the children with hand-me-down clothes and other essentials. Help was also forthcoming from the Salem Lutheran Church where the family attended church regularly.

"There was never a time when we didn't all go to church together," said Nancy. "We learned that from our mom."

But despite the encouragement and determination, others in the community were not so sympathetic.

"There was a woman from the welfare office who was bound and determined not to make it work. Right from the beginning, the welfare wanted to split us up," said Nancy. "People from the health department were always coming by to see if our house was clean and the kids were well taken care of. But they never found anything."

The family lived on a small stipend they received from the state and even that was up for grabs.

"It was very, very difficult financially," said Nancy. "If any of us worked, it was on the sly because if we earned any extra money, it was deducted from the money we got from the state. My sister Pat earned some money babysitting and that much was deducted from the stipend."

But even though Lou had so many of us to take care of, she was bound and determined that our family would stay together."

After she graduated, Lou stayed at home until Nancy turned 16. Then she got a job in the evening at Spar's Italian Restaurant where she met her future husband, Jim Rose.

"Our dartball team stopped off at Spars," Jim explained. "Everyone ordered hamburgers, but it was a Friday and I couldn't have the meat so Lou just put a slice of onion on a bun and served it to me and charged me the same as the others who got a whole hamburger!" Looking at his wife with a sly grin, he stated, "So I got revenge and married her."

Jim recalls the first time he was invited to dinner in his fiance's home. "I tried to eat but I had nine

pairs of eyes looking at me the whole time,” he said. “I guess they weren’t used to having a stranger in the house.”

Sandy was 9 years old when her oldest sister became engaged to Jim. “I remember I cried and cried because I thought he was taking Lou away from us.”

But Jim’s planned revenge came at a price. He was well aware that in marrying Luella, he was taking on the responsibility of an instant family. Nevertheless, the couple wed in 1955 and later became parents of six children of their own.

“Every time we married one of them (brothers and sisters) off and got them out of the house, we had another child,” he said with a laugh. “But one positive thing — we all became one family and we never had to get a babysitter when we went to play dartball.”

Jim’s entry into the family provided a little more stability, particularly with finances, but he also gave them lessons that have lasted throughout the years.

“He taught us all that if we can’t afford it, we don’t need it,” said Sandy, adding hastily, “Not that we ever had any money to throw around.”

While still in high school, Nancy worked part-time at the Stonehouse, cutting vegetables for salad and peeling potatoes.

“Ted Breitenbach paid my salary out of his own pocket so it didn’t have to come out of the business,” she said.

Nancy also met her future husband, Allen Hendrickson, at Spars. After their marriage, she made a career of cooking in area restaurants and later opened a daycare center in her home, which she operates to this day.

“There was always a lot of love in our family,” said Sandy. “Everyone was close then and it hasn’t changed. It was a lot of hard work but it was worth it. We all had to pitch in and help. We’ve always been very proud of ourselves. Other people may not have noticed us, but we did. We never had any trouble with any of the kids. All of them graduated from high school and have wonderful families.”

Although everyone in the family always pitched in and helped throughout the years, it’s obvious who ruled the roost — Luella.

“We didn’t call her ‘The Head Red’ for nothing,” Sandy said. The red, she explained, had nothing to do with the color of Lou’s hair but her Russian heritage. “Lou always made all the rules and she always insisted that we obey them. Even now, though she’s in a wheelchair and isn’t able to speak, we never make any plans without running them by her first for her approval. She’s still the one in charge.”

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Article published May 10, 2007

BREAKING NEWS: Jefferson expels student in bomb threat case

The Jefferson Schools Board of Education on Thursday expelled a freshman after she allegedly scrawled a bomb threat in a bathroom two weeks ago.

The 15-year-old girl will not be able to seek reinstatement to the district until at least 2008, said Supt. Timothy Fitzpatrick.

Additionally, the girl has been charged criminally in juvenile court. The Monroe County prosecutor's office charged her with false report or threat of terrorism and false reporting of a bomb.

If she were an adult, the terrorism charge would carry a maximum sentence of 20 years in prison and the felony bomb threat charge a sentence of four years.

The girl was arrested April 27 after she admitted to school officials that she wrote a threat on a shelf in a bathroom. She said she did it so school would be let out early, however there was no evacuation.

The board voted unanimously to expel the girl. She must meet certain requirements before she can seek reinstatement, Mr. Fitzpatrick said.

Meanwhile, an expulsion hearing for four Monroe High School girls believed to be involved with a series of bomb threats that led to evacuations and disruptions has been put on hold.

School officials are waiting for the police report to be completed before pursuing expulsion. The four girls are not allowed at school in the meantime, the district reported.



Anti-poverty experts decry proposed cuts

Monday, May 14, 2007

SARAH KELLOGG

NEWS WASHINGTON BUREAU and BARRIE BARBER THE SAGINAW NEWS

WASHINGTON -- With one in nine Michigan residents -- one in six in Saginaw County -- turning to food stamps, the president's plan to trim more than \$540 million from food assistance aid to the poor over five years has Michigan officials worried.

They are pressing Congress to reject Bush administration efforts to cut the

\$37 billion initiative this year. Instead, they'd like lawmakers to expand eligibility to more working-poor families and increase the monthly benefit.

"This is a critical support to families," said Marianne Udow, director of the state Department of Human Services. "Ten percent of Michigan families receive some food assistance. We have more Michigan citizens receiving food stamps than ever before."

Food stamps have become a staple for Michigan's poor and working-class families. In 2000, an average of 602,000 Michigan residents received food stamps every month; last year, 1.1 million received them. About 80 percent of food stamps go to households with children.

While the number of Saginaw County residents eligible to receive food stamps has remained even in recent years -- it reached 34,510 in February -- the number of people asking for emergency aid has shot up significantly, said Randy R. Barst, director of the County Department of Human Services.

The state sends a family of three with no other income up to a \$489 cash grant and \$281 a month in food aid.

"They've chosen to let some bills go unpaid because they need basic food and shelter," he said.

The agency recorded 1,560 pleas for emergency help in March, compared to 1,148 in April 2006, Barst said.

The state has bumped up food stamp payments in small increments, but it's not enough to meet the need, Barst said. Recipients use a "Bridge Card," which acts like a debit card and replaces food stamps of years past.

"The big issue is there really haven't been significant increases in public assistance to meet the need," Barst said. "There are more people in Michigan concerned about losing their job."

The Bush administration signaled its plans to reduce spending on food stamps in two venues -- its proposed 2008 federal budget and the 2007 farm bill, which lays out federal farm and nutrition policies and spending for the next five years.

Bush administration officials argue that they expect food stamp caseloads to shrink.

This month, Congress will weigh in on the proposals. Anti-poverty advocates hope lawmakers limit the president's cuts, which include elimination of an initiative that automatically qualifies some families for food stamps when they receive welfare, child care or transportation assistance. About 26,000 Michigan residents would face the effects.

"In our view, it's extremely short-sighted to cut this support," said Udow. "Food assistance is provided to people who are in serious need."

Udow said the state also wants to ensure that its aid to cover single adults won't end up on the chopping block. Michigan has a waiver from the federal government to cover single adults. About 83,000 adults without children receive monthly benefits under the waiver.

"Given Michigan's high unemployment, given the growth in low-wage jobs, we need to have a fully funded food stamp program," said Sharon Parks, a spokeswoman for the Michigan League for Human Services, an anti-poverty group in Lansing. "The fact that we've seen the amazing increase in caseloads over the last few years has everything to do with Michigan's poor economy."

Michigan isn't alone. The federal government estimated that about 35 million Americans lacked enough money to buy food on a regular basis in 2006. Nationally about 26 million individuals receive food stamps every month.

The average family of four qualifies for a maximum of \$518 in food stamps monthly, while the maximum for individuals is \$155, the U.S. Department of Agriculture said. To qualify for benefits, individuals must have a gross monthly income of \$1,062 or less. A family of four is eligible if it has a gross monthly household income of \$2,167 or less.

Legislation introduced this month would invest an additional \$20 billion in nutrition during the next five years. Most of that would go for food stamps, to plug the holes in the president's budget and farm bill proposals. v

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Rent subsidies available through \$750,000 grant

Up to 50 homeless families might be able to get their housing rent subsidized for up to two years through Mid Michigan Community Action Agency's Tenant Based Rental Assistance program.

The \$750,000 grant from Michigan State Housing Development Authority allowed for the creation of 50 "Tenant Based Rental Assistance" vouchers -- 10 of which are available in Midland County. Under the plan, up to 70 percent of the family's rent could be subsidized.

A family is eligible for the program if there are dependent children and the family is homeless -- meaning they lack a fixed, regular and adequate nighttime residence. Eligible families will be referred to Mid Michigan Community Action through shelter managers, the Department of Human Services and other program partners.

The vouchers are available on a first come, first served basis, but priority will be given to homeless people living on the street or in domestic violence and homeless shelters.

Once a family is referred and their paperwork is processed, they can move into a residence that has been inspected and passes the state's housing quality standards.

Participating families will be responsible for paying up to 30 percent of their income toward rent and the community action organization will subsidize the remaining 70 percent. Participants can remain in the assistance voucher program for up to two years, with the ultimate goal being that they secure permanent housing.

If the family is able to secure permanent housing before the two years are up or if they leave the program for other reasons, the slot then becomes available for another family.

In addition to subsidizing the rent, Mid Michigan Community Action Agency will refer the participant to primary partner organizations, which include the American Red Cross, Salvation Army, Department of Human Services, Midland Area Homes, Michigan Works!, Women's Aid Services, Shelterhouse, Women's Center, Good Samaritan Shelter and the local Community Mental Health agencies.

Each primary partner is an active member of the Continuum of Care in their respective county. All of these organizations presently serve homeless families and have invaluable experience to offer this program.

The Tenant Based Rental Assistance program is part of the "Ten Year Plan to End Homelessness in Michigan" initiative, in which every county in Michigan is participating.

The assistance program is one of many programs that are ongoing in Midland County. In program year 2006, MMCAA helped more than 4,400 households with more than \$2.48 million in services.

The 50 available vouchers are divided up as follows: Bay County has 20; Midland County has 10; and Clare, Gladwin, Isabella and Gratiot counties have five each. The distribution of the vouchers was determined by need.

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DHS community forum planned at Washington

HOMETOWN HEADLINES

FLINT

THE FLINT JOURNAL FIRST EDITION

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By Ron Fonger

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FLINT - A community forum at Washington Elementary School will focus on Genesee County Department of Human Services programs, including food assistance and foster parent training.

The forum will be held from 4-6 p.m. May 31 at Washington, 1400 N. Vernon Ave., and will feature a panel of speakers representing the legal system, resources available to Flint's East Side community, and programs offered by DHS.

Similar forums were held at Southwestern Academy and Atherton High School. Spanish speaking interpreters will be available at the Washington forum, according to a news release.

Details: Kimberlee LeFear at DHS at (810) 760-2606.

- Ron Fonger

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